

Education Task Force
June 26, 2013

My name is Peggy Jo Kennett. This year I serve as President of the Utah School Boards Association and I am a member of the Jordan School Board. Our Association represents all of the locally elected School Board Members in the State.

Thank you to the Education Task Force for this opportunity to present information from our perspective on key elements that will contribute to student achievement.

We have identified five key elements that are critical components of increasing student achievement:

1. **Funding for Quality Instruction**

We need to ensure that we have a highly trained, highly qualified and enthusiastic teacher in every classroom every day. We want to attract the best and brightest to be our teachers and administrators and we want to be able to retain them. As the education sector competes with graduates from industry sectors in biology, physics, mathematics, and business, school leaders need to attract top candidates from those fields with increased salaries, benefits, and working conditions. The Legislature's increased funding of the basic program for schools is vital and appreciated. **Continuing to focus on the Weighted Pupil Unit and on fully funding enrollment growth** will help the basic program for schools to grow and potentially attract great college graduates. No profession in the world of work is more vital to our country's well-being and to our state's economy than that of the teachers of our children.

2. **Professional Development**

In the past five years, public schools in Utah have been asked to undertake enormous legislative challenges: the new Utah Core; Computer-Adaptive Testing; School Grading; and Evaluations for Administrators, Teachers, and Staff. Additionally, the use of technology is very important in schools and must be well-understood to be used efficiently and effectively. And from this past legislative session, local and charter school boards know we will need to provide time for teachers to understand changes in School Land Trust elections, suicide prevention programs and strategies, STEM best practices and student competitions, State Capitol Visiting options, and major changes in universal college and career readiness testing, to name a few. Add these to annual requirements for professional

development in sexual harrassment, safe schools policies and procedures, and specific district and/or building initiatives. It is no wonder teachers are exasperated trying to meet all of these expectations while still preserving time for their most vital job: preparing rigorous and engaging lessons for students.

Any one of these would require time for teachers and administrators to understand, absorb, and plan for implementation. But with all of these changes happening at the same time, our teachers and staff are under enormous pressure to understand and implement each well. Added to this pressure is the fact that schools lost all of their professional development funding during the recent economic downturn. There is no time to understand quality software or how to use data from computer-adaptive testing when you have 32 children at your elbow all day long in your classroom. **Schools desperately need paid time and resources to provide information and discussion about these new expectations.** We want to successfully implement these recent legislative mandates and to take advantage of excellent opportunities that may exist through technology applications. Teachers need time for professional development, discussion, and expert training.

3. **Flexibility**

Schooling is vastly different in various locations of our state. Whereas Granite District can greatly benefit, perhaps, by ELL software or reading tutors, Wayne County Schools may need greater funding available to attract and retain teachers in its rural setting. Some San Juan school children must ride a bus ONE WAY for one hour and 40 minutes so transportation is a huge issue in their district. In my own district, Jordan, our board is faced with looming enrollment growth and the work that we do to efficiently utilize WPU funds may be very different from how other districts may operate. Districts with stagnant growth or very small districts and schools obviously have needs very different from those of my district.

The use of school funding looks different in each of our 41 school districts but is overseen by elected members of the local school board who are most often parents of children attending their schools. **In all of your legislative action, please remember to include local flexibility in implementation so that we can tailor programs and mandates to meet the needs of our unique demographics and challenges.** We have appreciated your efforts to do so in recent years and recognize that the Legislature has granted options in the selection of early childhood learning software, options of use in otherwise categorical funding, and options in fabulous programs such as dual immersion. State leaders working to ensure quality local leadership is a good example of what is right with Utah.

4. Alignment

Competency-based education is constructed on the belief that all students can be expected to learn, to mastery, key standards of education. While all the elements of a balanced and enriching education are vitally important to its final outcome, nothing is more important than a *deliberate alignment* within the school system of all of its elements: standards, assessment, data collection and use, lesson design, lesson delivery, time, student time on task, personnel policies, energy of personnel, money, equipment, teaching expertise, textbooks, affecting legislation, parental support, remediation efforts, and school leadership, to mention a few. Every effort that goes into Utah's classrooms must be aligned to the ultimate goal: mastery of key standards. This is a major part of the key work of school boards. Alignment of local, state and federal resources of time, money, personnel, software, equipment and the like, is critical and is the chief work of local school boards.

5. Accountability

I represent over 200 locally elected leaders who are vitally concerned that all children in Utah succeed with competency in Utah's K-12 public school system. Like you, we work tirelessly in behalf of Utah's parents, working to ensure quality and excellence. **Being accountable for the funds we oversee is important; aligning those funds with strategic goals for student achievement is even more vital.** We look forward to our continuing work together to align our systems, our legislation, our goals, our resources, and our mutual commitment to help every child succeed.

Thank you for the time you have allowed for our response. We look forward to advancing the goals of success for all children through strong WPU increases, fully funding enrollment growth, allowing for local leadership and flexibility, alignment of resources to meet our goals, and holding the system and ourselves accountable for our elected leadership.